

Winter Use Plan and EIS

Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks

John D. Rockefeller, Jr., Memorial Parkway



Newsletter – March 2006

The National Park Service (NPS) has begun preparation of a long-term plan for managing winter recreational use in Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks and the John D. Rockefeller, Jr., Memorial Parkway. The next formal public comment opportunity will be when the Draft EIS is released in fall 2006.

WHY ANOTHER EIS?

The Temporary Winter Use EA is only intended to guide winter management for three winter seasons; this winter was the second season of operation under the temporary EA. During this three-year period, the EA states that the NPS will prepare a long-term analysis on winter use in the parks.

PRELIMINARY ALTERNATIVES

The NPS developed ten scenarios for initial analysis. The NPS met with most cooperating agencies and other interest groups to discuss each of these scenarios (which were shared in an earlier newsletter). The NPS received valuable feedback on the scenarios. While these modeling scenarios represent a wide range of possible conditions, only certain elements of them will be carried forward during the development of alternatives. Following are the preliminary alternatives that will probably be considered in the EIS.

PRELIMINARY ALTERNATIVE 1: CONTINUE TEMPORARY PLAN

Allows for nearly historic levels of snowmobile use and requires commercial guiding. This alternative mirrors the

temporary winter use plan currently in place with 720 BAT snowmobiles and 78 snowcoaches per day in Yellowstone National Park. Two key changes are that all snowcoaches must meet Best Available Technology (BAT) standards, and a daily limit on snowcoaches is implemented. Firehole Canyon Drive would be open afternoons to snowmobiles and Lake Butte would be open to snowmobiles. Sylvan Pass may be closed. All other side roads would be open to snowcoaches only. For Grand Teton National Park & the John D. Rockefeller, Jr., Memorial Parkway (the Parkway), this alternative allows 50 snowmobiles per day on both the Grassy Lake Road and Continental Divide Snowmobile Trail (CDST), as well as 40 snowmobiles per day on Jackson Lake for fishing access. With some exceptions, all snowmobiles in Grand Teton and the Parkway would be BAT.

PRELIMINARY ALTERNATIVE 2: SNOWCOACHES ONLY

Emphasizes commercial snowcoach access, and prohibits recreational snowmobiling in Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks and the Parkway. Road grooming would continue with the exception of Sylvan Pass, which would close to oversnow travel. This alternative most closely matches the November 2000 decision and allows for 120 BAT snowcoaches per day.

PRELIMINARY ALTERNATIVE 3: ELIMINATE MOST ROAD GROOMING

Prohibits road grooming or packing on most road segments in Yellowstone National Park. The road from the South

For more information, please visit: www.nps.gov/yell/winteruse.htm

You may also contact Yellowstone National Park at: 307-244-2019.

Entrance to Old Faithful would be the only oversnow motorized access route maintained in Yellowstone. 250 commercially guided BAT snowmobiles and 20 BAT snowcoaches would be allowed to enter the park daily. For Grand Teton National Park & the Parkway, this alternative allows 50 BAT snowmobiles per day on the Grassy Lake Road. Jackson Lake and the CDST would be closed to snowmobiling.

PRELIMINARY ALTERNATIVE 4: EXPAND RECREATIONAL USE

Allows for an increase in snowmobile use, relative to historic numbers, and opens all side roads to snowmobile use. Commercial guides would be required for most snowmobilers; some could also visit the park after completing an unguided or non-commercial guide training course. 1,025 BAT snowmobiles and 105 BAT snowcoaches per day could enter Yellowstone National Park. For Grand Teton National Park & the Parkway, 75 non-BAT snowmobiles on the Grassy Lake Road (for either direction), 75 BAT snowmobiles on the CDST, and 100 BAT snowmobiles per day on Jackson Lake for fishing access would be allowed.

PRELIMINARY ALTERNATIVE 5: UNGUIDED ACCESS

Balances snowmobile and snowcoach access and accommodates visitors who wish to have an unguided snowmobile experience. This alternative would allow 540 improved BAT snowmobiles and 83 BAT snowcoaches per day in Yellowstone National Park. Twenty percent of daily entries would be unguided. Firehole Canyon Drive would be open afternoons to snowmobiles and Lake Butte would be open to snowmobiles. For Grand Teton National Park & the Parkway, this alternative would allow 50 improved BAT snowmobiles per day on both the Grassy Lake Road and

Continental Divide Snowmobile Trail (CDST), as well as 40 improved BAT snowmobiles per day on Jackson Lake for fishing access.

PRELIMINARY ALTERNATIVE 6: MIXED USE

Emphasizes plowing of Yellowstone's west-side roads to promote more affordable winter visits. Continues to allow snowmobile and snowcoach access through the South Entrance and on the east side of the park. Both oversnow and wheeled access would be commercially guided only. This alternative would allow 350 BAT snowmobiles and 40 BAT snowcoaches per day in Yellowstone National Park. Side roads would be groomed or plowed, depending on location. For Grand Teton National Park & the Parkway, this alternative allows 50 BAT snowmobiles per day on the Grassy Lake Road as well as 40 BAT snowmobiles per day on Jackson Lake for fishing access. The CDST would be closed.

ACTIONS COMMON ACROSS ALTERNATIVES

Elements of some modeling scenarios can reasonably be applied to several alternatives to allow for adaptive management techniques. These actions are not tied to specific preliminary alternatives.

In Yellowstone:

- Possible seasonal, rather than daily, limits for each alternative. Seasonal limits could apply to both snowcoaches and snowmobiles.
- A possible phased research program to investigate bison use of groomed roadways.

In Grand Teton and the Parkway:

- On the Grassy Lake Road, BAT requirement applies only to snowmobiles originating at Flagg Ranch.

For more information, please visit: www.nps.gov/yell/winteruse.htm

You may also contact Yellowstone National Park at: 307-244-2019.

- For alternatives that include use of the CDST, the NPS will monitor and evaluate its use and consider adaptive management strategies, including potential closure if use levels do not warrant its continued operation.

NEXT STEPS

Open houses were held in Bozeman, MT and Jackson Hole, WY the week of March

13, 2006. Participants at these open houses discussed these preliminary alternatives, and were provided an optional feedback form. That form is enclosed in this newsletter for your consideration as well. To be most useful to the NPS, commentors should mail their forms so the NPS receives them on or before March 24, 2006. The NPS expects to release a Draft EIS for formal public comment by fall 2006.

For more information, please visit: www.nps.gov/yell/winteruse.htm

You may also contact Yellowstone National Park at: 307-244-2019.

Yellowstone - Grand Teton Winter Use YOUR FEEDBACK ON PRELIMINARY ALTERNATIVES

3-14-06: GranTree Hotel, Bozeman MT
3-16-06: Snow King Conference Center, Jackson Hole WY
Both locations: 3-7 pm

- These things appear to be *missing* from the *preliminary* alternatives:
- Is there a key point in the analysis that has been overlooked?

OPTIONAL:

Name _____ Affiliation _____

- **How to get your feedback to NPS by March 24, 2006:**
 - Please place this form in the box by the door as you leave tonight.
 - You can also mail your form to Winter Use, Yellowstone National Park, PO Box 168, Yellowstone National Park, Wyoming 82190. Please mail for delivery by **March 24, 2006**.
 - If you are not sure whether or not you are on the contact list, please email yell_winter_use@nps.gov with your contact information.
- **How the Team will use this feedback:** the Team seeks your early, informal input through this written feedback form to assist them in ensuring that the alternatives will be thoroughly developed. This is not a 'voting' opportunity to express preferences for or against the emerging alternatives; the Team will consider concerns and ideas offered, but will NOT 'weigh' comments according to the number of times the same comment is received.
- **If you miss the March 24 deadline:** Your comments will still be welcome, but less useful to the analysis. All distinct and substantive feedback forms received by the Team will be filed in the administrative record regardless of when they are received.
- **Next Steps = the Draft EIS:** A draft EIS is expected next fall (2006). The official public comment period on the DEIS (Draft Environmental Impact Statement) will be at least 60 days.

Thank you!